



## Teacher candidates as AmeriCorps members implementing service-learning in K-12 classrooms: An authentic community connection

Marjori Krebs, Assistant Professor, University of New Mexico [mkrebs@unm.edu]

Kiran Katira, Coordinator of Campus Community Engagement, University of New Mexico  
[kiru2u@yahoo.com]

Swetchha Singh, Program Coordinator, Community Outreach, University of New Mexico  
[swetchha@hotmail.com]

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## Summary

The University of New Mexico TeacherCorps program combines AmeriCorps funding with teacher education through a sociocultural constructivism lens that focuses on the assets of communities. TeacherCorps is designed to transform teacher preparation by providing professional development through social justice and service-learning to address community-identified needs.

Through this study, researchers are learning how TeacherCorps members are influenced by this experience. The research questions are:

- a) Are candidates able to recognize the assets of their school communities?
- b) How are the candidates enhancing their perceptions of social justice, and how are they connecting service-learning projects to these tenets?
- c) How do candidates define service-learning?
- d) How do candidates explain the achievement gap along racial lines?

The conceptual framework for this study draws on sociocultural constructionism (Shaw, 1995), cultural constructionism (Hooper, 1998), and building communities based on their assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The theory of sociocultural constructionism brings together the individual and community to produce change (Pinkett, 2000). Researchers believe that participation in TeacherCorps will allow candidates to have a strengthened community-asset and social justice lenses. This, in turn, will help them empower their students to improve areas of deficit.

The study includes 10 participants: two elementary licensure graduate students, six elementary licensure undergraduate students, and two secondary licensure undergraduate students. Participants completed qualitative open-ended surveys upon entering and exiting the program, and they participated in focus groups after completing the program.

Survey results were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modifications of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data. In the preliminary analysis, candidates had limited understanding of service-learning and the achievement gap. Additionally, candidates had limited vocabulary to define concepts and explain situations. There was, however, evidence of a beginning-level understanding of community assets. By adding a social justice focus to the reflection sessions, TeacherCorps participant implementation of curriculum will have a greater focus on the contexts in which their students live and will empower their students to focus on leveraging the assets of their communities to improve the areas of deficit.

## **References**

There were no references provided with this proposal.